

Northbrook, Ill. – Following an ad hoc congressional hearing on illegal guns in Washington, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, local and law enforcement officials today called for federal action to combat the rise of illegal gun trafficking in the Chicago area. Kirk highlighted two key weaknesses in federal gun laws: First, a GAO study shows individuals on the FBI’s terrorist watch list were able to purchase guns 47 times out of 58 attempts from gun stores (terrorist watch lists currently are not included in required weapon background checks). Second, federal records show that just four Mississippi gun shops were the source for over 300 crime guns in the Chicago area. Federal laws do not help in the tracing of many guns that eventually are used in crimes.

Congressman Kirk was joined by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Special Agent-in-Charge Andy Traver, Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran, Palatine Mayor Rita Mullins and Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence Executive Director Thom Mannard. Kirk is the co-chair of the Congressional Task Force for Mayors Against Illegal Guns. Mayors Against Illegal Guns is a group organized by Mayors Daley (Chicago), Bloomberg (New York) and Menino (Boston). Mayor Mullins (Palatine) also is a member. The organization released a major report on illegal guns this week.

“Nothing tears a community apart more than gun violence,” said Congressman Kirk. “Last year, the ATF recovered more than 160 guns from criminal investigations in the northern suburbs. By reforming gun shows, stopping ‘fire sales,’ and blocking straw gun purchasers, we can make it much more difficult for criminals to get guns. We also need to close the terrorist watch list loophole. Right now, someone on the terrorist ‘no-fly list’ can’t get on a plane, but they can purchase a gun. Suspected terrorists should not be allowed to walk into a gun store and arm themselves.”

According to Mayors Against Illegal Guns, one percent of firearm dealers account for 57 percent of gun traces. Four gun shops in Mississippi supply much of the illegal weapons seized in the Chicago area according to the ATF. More than 300 Chicago area crime guns were traced to the following gun shops:

fP Mega Pawn (Clarksdale),
fP Krosstown Trade & Pawn (Clarksdale),
fP North Delta Gun Shop (Clarksdale), and
fP Route 61 Trade & Pawn (Tunica).

From Krosstown Trade & Pawn alone, there were 76 weapons recovered since 2004. Investigators learned that most of the weapons were purchased by a small handful of straw purchasers living in and around Jonestown, Mississippi, and then brought to Chicagoland.

Mayors Against Illegal Guns also reported that in a recent audit of 3,000 Federal Firearm Licensees (FFLs), over 12,000 gun records were missing. An astonishing 11,000 of these records were missing from just 97 of the 3,000 FFLs.

Congressman Kirk highlighted four common-sense actions the Congress should take to reduce the spread of illegal guns. These recommendations include:

- Close the gun show loophole. Unlicensed individual gun sellers and “occasional sellers” are not required to perform background checks on gun purchasers. The weapons used in the Columbine school shootings were purchased at a gun show without background checks;
- Require gun dealers to perform criminal background checks on all gun-handling employees;
- Close the fire sale loophole that allows dealers whose licenses have been revoked to continue to sell their inventory without conducting background checks; and
- Close the “terror gap” that leaves those on the terrorist no-fly list off the list of prohibited purchasers of firearms.

The Congressional Task Force Against Illegal Guns currently is drafting legislation to implement the recommendations of Mayors Against Illegal Guns. Congressman Kirk’s co-chairs include U.S. Representatives Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Peter King (R-N.Y.).